



# Wisconsin Main Street Case Study Promotion

## Hot Air Balloon Rally and Chalk Fest Wausau

Special events represent opportunities for communities to showcase their downtowns, generate traffic, provide entertainment and perhaps celebrate heritage. One of Wausau's events is the annual Hot Air Balloon Rally and Chalk Fest sponsored by Wausau Area Events. This highly visual event focuses on local and regional artists and balloon pilots, who come to Wausau to create one-of-a-kind sidewalk art, or showcase their aviation skills. These very different events provide a full schedule of activities and attractions for visitors and residents. The event requires dozens of volunteers who serve as crew for balloon teams, art judges, food vendors, safety squads, traffic and crowd controllers, greeters, and first aid workers. The schedule begins mid-week with a chalk art clinic for registrants. The clinic is an opportunity to meet and learn from the Master Artist.



*A large crowd gathers around the "glow at dusk" in downtown Wausau*



*Strollers enjoy the amazing chalk art on the Wausau City Square.*

On Friday, the Master Artist begins work on his/her masterpiece in the City Square. Friday evening marks the beginning of the ballooning events with a glow at dusk. Several balloons inflate and glow, amid hundreds of onlookers. On Saturday morning, the balloonists gather at the downtown municipal airport to begin the competitive portion of the event. Thousands of spectators gather to witness the skills games, launches and landings. Food and beverages are available throughout the day, as well as the chance for the public to meet and greet the pilots, and witness a parachuting troop of Elvis impersonators. The activities then shift back to the City Square as registrants begin work on their art pieces. Each registrant is given a designated space to create their work. Onlookers stroll the square, watching work in progress. Retailers hold a Hot Air Hot Savings sidewalk sale. In the evening the activities shift back to the airport with another competitive launch. In 2004, the evening launch also featured a Cluster Balloonist who entertained the crowd by inflating dozens of helium filled balloons, strapping them to his body, and flying over 30 miles at nearly 2,500 feet. At dusk, all the balloons gather once again for a glow. Sunday morning features the last balloon launch, and the chalk artists finish their work in time for the judging ceremony.

Wausau's target audience for this event is primarily children and families, artists and art students, and shutterbugs, as the event is highly visual. The goal is to present a signature weekend event for downtown Wausau that not only provides entertainment, but has a positive impact on the community by generating activity in the stores and hotels. People are drawn from all over the Midwest. Attendance is approximately 8,000 people over the three days. The event has had a positive economic impact for the community and has engaged a new volunteer pool. The event requires many different sources of revenue including sponsorships, in-kind city services and grants.